East Meets West: Philosophy, Critical Reflection and the Development of Teacher Leadership in Teacher Education

Janet Orchard

School of Education, University of Bristol

edjlo@bristol.ac.uk

Wai-yan Sally Wan

Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

sallywywan@cuhk.edu.hk

Introduction

Across the world, teacher education programmes are under review. In some contexts where its academic dimension is sufficiently well-established, philosophy may continue to thrive. However, in many other settings where the academic dimension is being downsized and fragmented in favour of employment-based learning, philosophy is under threat, if indeed it enjoys a place at all on the teacher education curriculum. Moreover, globalisation in teacher education has infused its context specific dimensions (Robertson 2013), such that a prevailing concern with educational 'quality', and connected to this 'teacher leadership', has dominated the policy discourse (hence practice) over a number of years (Oancea and Orchard, 2012) and in most jurisdictions.

Yet even on an employment-based model, strong arguments have been made for philosophy in teachers' professional formation programmes generally, an argument which

may also be relevant to those needing to defend the retention of philosophy on more academic pre-service programmes, where these are being challenged by the dominant global teacher education discourse. Philosophy has a role to play in informing the professional judgement of teachers which, these arguments maintain, is characteristic of good leaders being promoted in this dominant policy context.

At the same time, attention also needs to be paid to the cultural biases evident in the current literature in the state of knowledge of the field being summarized. The notions of teaching, leadership and philosophy to be found there need to be broadened in future studies, to include a wider range of non-Western perspectives and philosophies; and when this is undertaken, new possibilities will be opened up in relation to what it means to think and act well as a teacher. In an early attempt attending to this bias, what follows has been co-authored by university-based teacher educators in two culturally and historically contrasting settings, Hong Kong and the UK, who hold contrasting methodological perspectives and has evolved out of an established and ongoing dialogue between them.

In Hong Kong, concerns about the quality of teachers and teacher education date back to the 1990s, reflected in numerous policy documents, leading to changes in the direction of graduate and formally trained teachers. Expectations of teacher qualifications and professional competencies have risen. Graduate posts have now been introduced into primary schools, non-graduate teacher certificates replaced by undergraduate Bachelors

and Postgraduate Diploma in Education programmes as the required professional qualification. These are offered by five universities, four of which are publicly-financed, with the full-time five-year Bachelor of Education programme requiring 14-16 weeks of successful teaching practice to qualify students as teachers in Hong Kong since 2012. The Postgraduate Diploma in Education is offered in one-year full-time and two-year part-time modes, similarly involving 16-weeks of teaching practice. The development of subject knowledge and pedagogical skills has been a strong focus of these programmes.

Reflecting the four separate jurisdictions by which it is constituted, policies across the UK vary, while constructed around a concern with improving quality and accountability in teacher education (Oancea and Orchard, 2012) in line with that in Hong Kong. In England, rules regarding the employment of unqualified teachers in certain kinds of state-funded schools have been relaxed since 2012, while in Scotland all teachers in state-funded schools must be qualified. Long-standing arguments in England for increasingly school and classroom-based pre-service teacher education have dominated policy-making since 2010; while in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales there has been an ongoing concern to improve teaching and school leadership through a balanced partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs).

Focusing on England specifically, expectations of teacher qualifications remain high, but policies tend to reflect a particular concern with teachers' expertise in technical pedagogical content knowledge rather than educational theory combined with practical professional classroom competencies and skills. Similar to Hong Kong, training through

an undergraduate degree programme combined with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is possible in England but most people entering teaching still pursue the 36-week Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) route, of which 24 weeks are normally spent on school placement.

Reaction to change to teacher education in England has been mixed. Some schools and private providers have moved quickly to embrace the new opportunities presented, and some of this practice is likely to be excellent. Others remain committed firmly to established and familiar initial teacher education practices. Moreover, a role for universities continues to be identified (Oancea and Orchard 2012; Orchard and Winch 2015), even on the most conservative readings. As a minimum, it has been argued, teachers need to be made aware of the findings of educational theory and research, through enquiry and reflective practice, facilitated through a process of knowledge exchange between schools and universities. Furthermore, the role of the university in helping practitioners to establish individual and professional values in teaching through reflection continues to be argued for and university-linked programmes remain by far the most popular with applicants.

In past decades, the concept of teacher leadership has also attracted considerable attention, not only in the academic field of education but among policy makers, given their concerns with quality in teaching, and the findings of various studies which suggest that teacher leadership has a significant contribution to make to school development and improving student achievement. Harris' work (e.g. 2013) on teacher leadership is indicative and influential. Teacher leadership is commonly associated with formal responsibilities and

roles exercised in teaching, including senior leaders like school principals or middle leaders with pastoral or curriculum portfolios, who carry the officially delegated administrative responsibilities and duties in school management works as assigned by schools. However, teacher leadership may also be understood in an informal sense, to reflect the contributions any teacher can make, regardless of their formal role, to decision making and strategic thinking processes which determine the school's future direction.

Teacher leadership of this second kind particularly has been recognized as making a significant contribution to teacher quality. Under the neo-liberal rhetoric of increasing decentralization of power by the introduction of markets to education provision, including localized school-based management, policy makers in many parts of the world have seemingly highlighted the potential for teachers as professional experts to have more opportunities to participate in decision-making. A number of sociologists of education have taken issue with the extent to which teachers are in fact autonomous (e.g. Robertson 2013).

Nevertheless, taking the point at face value here, at the level of principle the implications of teachers needing to exercise agency of this kind for teacher education are considerable. For if all teachers need to show leadership, where does this capacity come from and how should it be developed? Some teachers may take to the rights and responsibilities of informal school leadership seemingly spontaneously or naturally, however others may find the prospect challenging and non-intuitive.

One important source will be learning by example, whereby novice teachers learn from the positive example of classroom experts. Informal teacher leadership can occur spontaneously throughout a school both within and beyond an individual's classroom, precisely because it is not limited to formal roles and responsibilities, so that pre-service teachers will learn by observing it modelled. Take for example, the use of student performance data to review evidence of learning and teaching. Good teachers will recognize the need to conform to current conventions of good practice in the current educational climate. They won't follow a clearly defined script exactly as an excellent technician might but interpret it in context, drawing on their professional judgement to reach a balanced, rounded and humanistic assessment of how children are getting along in their classes.

However, the example just cited has been chosen quite deliberately because, while it refers to an everyday, practical matter in the lives of teachers, it is also highly contentious. The account of the good teacher in which it is steeped assumes, inevitably, a particular view of the 'good' in schooling (i.e. in this example that the best teachers are respectful of policy requirements but seek to humanize it and avoid following it slavishly to the letter). Good teachers, on this account, have to face dynamic, complex uncertainties and challenges in a situated way requiring them to be critical and reflective. This assumption reveals a significant cultural bias too, a point returned to later.

To 'think otherwise' in a situation, in other words to judge reliably and well when to follow the party line rigidly and when to deviate from it, can't be learned from experience alone,

but draws on other kinds of thinking, including the application of theoretical as well as technical knowledge to their actions in sufficient measure (Winch et al., 2015). So, if employment-based teacher education provision is to play a significant role in preparing teachers for the professional demands of exercising leadership, even at face value one important argument for retaining a sustained engagement with ethical theory in teacher education programmes is to support the development of teacher leadership as a form of 'thinking otherwise', so that the fullest development possible of teachers' professional judgement may be supported.

Ideally, the argument follows, this will happen from the outset, given these employed teachers are contractually fully responsible for their actions, rather than supernumerary. Yet currently there is still limited and narrowly-scoped provision of such kind of teacher leadership development in many parts of the world; they are the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, certain experiences of practice are more likely to allow for thinking otherwise than others, furnishing some teachers more opportunities to develop leadership from experience than others. Factors determining the degree to which 'thinking otherwise' is possible include social class, cultural expectations and gender but the issue is complex and multi-faceted and these are simply illustrative.

Expanding on this point, the argument continues, as well as practical experience teachers need other kinds of knowledge to be good at what they do, and that some of these come through engaging with theory and educational research (Winch et al 2015). It is important to stress that this knowledge on its own cannot equip teachers to exercise professional

reliably and well; good teaching is focused on right action in the various school and classroom contexts in which it is situated. However, theory can inform professional judgement, offering a more reliable and robust basis for this than common sense or intuition. Teachers able to make good situational judgments in this way do not rely on hearsay, or unreflective prejudice, but draw instead on well-thought-through and coherent conceptual frameworks to arrive at decisions in the classroom context; 'good sense' in the tradition established by Gramsci (see Winch et al 2015 for more on this argument). Prospective teachers need opportunities for a kind of "third-space" during their professional formation that allows them to explore and establish connections between their understanding of "how-to-teach" and "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1987), thus developing their capacity as teacher leaders.

Thinking about teachers in this way emphasizes the ethical dimension of teaching when exercising practically sound judgment in the classroom. When teachers deliberately seek to bring about certain outcomes rather than others, because they are concerned with doing the right thing for its own sake, they are conscious of acting ethically. But what is the right thing to do? Can a right thing to do be identified? These matters are complex and contested. Too often the focus in employment-based teacher education programmes is on the technical aspects of the craft; opportunities to reflect ethically on considerations of this nature do not feature prominently enough.

Were applied philosophical thinking in the western tradition included more systematically in teacher education programmes, it would speaking to these concerns by adding a series

of distinctive qualities to critical reflection by teachers (Oancea and Orchard 2012). Teachers might be clearer on the meanings of key words, concepts and propositions used in formal educational settings, their logical implications, and the normative assumptions underpinning their policy usage. Philosophical thinking could offer coherent and robust alternative language for teachers to consider and potentially use when articulating their views when thinking otherwise about substantive educational problems. Empirically, it is recognized widely that reflective processes play an important role in creating changes in teachers' knowledge and attitudes, which in turn contribute to the role they can play as leaders. Philosophy exposes teachers to models of 'intelligent argumentation' (Phillips, 2007 in Oancea and Orchard, 2012), exposing presumptions of thought to critical scrutiny.

For philosophy to be included in employment-based teacher education programmes in order to enhance teachers' situated professional judgement, a more 'implicitly' philosophical approach might be needed, in contrast to the more explicit or formal approach to philosophy of education as a foundational discipline familiar in jurisdictions more invested in the academic dimension of teachers' professional learning. One implicitly philosophical practice of 'Philosophy for Teachers (P4T)' has evolved in England on the margins of conventional pre-service provision (Orchard et al 2016) by which a community of enquiry is created on Deweyan lines, in the style of Philosophy for Children (P4C). This enables teachers to reflect and deliberate collectively on ethical dilemmas faced in the classroom as a professional learning community. Other established approaches to critical reflection on practice in teaching in teacher education practice that through one-to-one tutorials or self-reflection through journaling, Arguably, implicit 'philosophy' is included

in these practices. Distinctive to P4T, as against other more established models of critical reflection in teacher education, philosophers are present within the community of enquiry, contributing structured philosophical expertise in the underpinning to the ideas they bring to debate. Their input is difficult to construct, they must link clearly to the practical educational matters being investigated and communicated in language and in a style that is inclusive and accessible; however, when this is achieved, the impact on teachers' thinking has been observed to be powerful (Orchard et al., 2016).

Thinking to how work of this kind might be translated to other cultural contexts presents various challenges. Whose philosophy should frame the discussion? Why import, impose even, Deweyan pragmatism to a context steeped in alternative ways of thinking, acting and being when the enactment of teacher leadership will be constrained and bounded by an alternative set of traditional values. Indeed, in the Hong Kong context, notions of reflection-in-action, teacher leadership in the informal sense argued for in the (Anglo-American dominated educational leadership, management and administration literature) may be in complete tension with those values held widely in Confucian Heritage Cultural (CHC) contexts. By contrast, these may privilege the importance of patriotism, for example, emphasise the value of collective action but through professional relationships that are hierarchical not collegial. In these contexts, junior or non-positional teachers may well behave and respond to these established social norms by saving face and letting go of what they perceive to be the truth where necessary, making teacher leadership in the second sense we have described it very difficult.

In conclusion, currently, the place of philosophy of education in teacher education is downplayed very significantly in many parts of the world and its future is under threat. Pre-service programmes tend to focus on practical issues of what and how to teach and provide intensive care for functional aspects of teaching, such as class management strategies, inclusive teaching strategies. Very minimal attention is given to the development of teachers as reflective practitioner by contrast, including reflection on personal beliefs and orientations towards education.

Explicit forms of teaching of philosophy of education are likely to remain on the periphery of pre-service preparation for most teachers. However, more implicit forms of philosophical reflection might be developed to enhance the limited notion of critical reflection on practice pre-service teachers currently experience while on teaching practice (i.e. on field experience) rather than in the university. Thinking otherwise could have a role to play in addressing teachers' preparedness to think for themselves, make decisions and act as leaders in the face of the complex realities in school and classroom contexts.

Philosophical thinking linked to criticism and deliberation might come to be situated within the actions of teachers so that these become wilful (i.e. conscious), reflective (i.e. evaluative) and imaginative (i.e. deliberative about that which is not yet the case). It is precisely the opportunity (and responsibility) for independent, challenging and creative thinking of this kind which might help to promote teachers as leaders in this informal sense, whether or not the embrace formal positions of authority. Moreover, professional

autonomy of the kind being described might make teaching seem, in principle at least, a more attractive and exciting future career for graduates.

However, alongside this cautious optimism for the potential of philosophy, were its place reasserted more forcefully in pre and in-service teacher preparation, writing in this area consistently sounds a note of concern. 'Thinking otherwise' about the discourse of leadership and the value of personal autonomy it assumes serious questions must be asked about how far this reflects teachers' lived reality. Furthermore, given the culturally biased nature of notions of reflection-in-action and the good teacher, if philosophy is for teachers, whose kind of philosophy should they be encouraged to choose?

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